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XIV. POETRY, PROSE, AND RHYTHM

The following study represents an attempt to determine the fundamental difference between poetry and prose and the relation of simple rhythm, or metre, to poetry. The reader should bear in mind that in all branches of science and art distinctions and classifications hold good, as a rule, only in a broad and general way; there are always border-line phenomena that defy classification. For example, we make a general distinction between animal and plant life, and yet of some of the lower forms of life it is difficult to say whether they belong in the one class or in the other. Or again, it is no uncommon thing to hear chemists and physicists dispute regarding the provinces of their respective sciences. And again, rhythm and melody seem to us to be very different things, and yet at bottom they are both rhythm, because differences in pitch depend upon differences in frequency of vibration, and in any melody these vibration frequencies stand in a rhythmical relation to each other. The farther we penetrate into any subject, the more difficult does exact classification become. And so our distinction between poetry and prose must be taken in a rather broad and general way. There are pieces of prose which seem to be highly poetic in nature, and there are poems in which the writer seems to have encroached upon the province of prose. Be this as it may, I believe we can at least say that in this direction lies the field of poetry, in that the field of prose. With this general reservation, then, let us ask the question: What is the essential difference between poetry and prose?

Numerous attempts have been made to determine this difference. Most commonly the answer to the question has been that poetry represents an appeal to the emotions, prose to the reason. Let us glance at a few typical definitions of poetry:

Theodore Watts says: "Absolute poetry is the concrete

and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language."

C. M. Gayley: "Poetry may be defined as the imaginative and emotive expression or suggestion of that which has significance in the . . . metrical medium of language appropriate to the subject."

Coleridge: "The common essence of all the forms of poetry consists in the excitement of emotion for the immediate purpose of pleasure through the medium of beauty; herein contradistinguishing poetry from science, the immediate object and primary purpose of which is truth and possible utility."

R. M. Alden: "Poetry is the art of representing human experiences, in so far as they are of lasting or universal interest, in metrical language, usually with chief reference to the emotions and by means of the imagination"; and commenting on his phrase, "with chief reference to the emotions," Professor Alden continues: "Here the emotions are in contrast with the reason. Prose literature ordinarily makes its primary appeal to the reason, adding the materials of intelligent thinking one to the other, with clearness and coherence as its essential qualities. The poet on the other hand, although he too may appeal to the intelligence of his reader, seeks his point of contact with some possible emotion which will correspond with the emotion dominating his own theme. . . . A great poem is marked by the presentation of a great idea. Yet its characteristic quality will nevertheless be the fusion of this idea with an utterance of joy, sorrow, love, pity, or fear, by means of which it will find lodgment in the reader's mind, fused there also with the corresponding emotion."

The untenableness of this distinction, however, has been clearly pointed out by Professor F. N. Scott,¹ who maintains that "taking English prose in bulk and setting it over against

¹ "The Most Fundamental Differentia of Poetry and Prose," *P.M.L.A.* XIX. 250 ff.

English verse in bulk, it is not so easy as one might think, to say which of the two displays more joy, more wrath, more passion." To be sure the critics do not distinguish carefully between scientific prose and literary prose, or prose fiction. Alden seems to be contrasting scientific treatises with poetry, whereas Scott evidently has in mind prose fiction, when he attributes as much emotion to it as to poetry. The difference between the two classes of prose will be referred to later. Instead of drawing the distinction between the two forms of expression along the lines of emotion and reason, Professor Scott suggests that "poetry is communication in language for expression's sake; prose is expression in language for communication's sake," an idea which, he says, was suggested to him by John Stuart Mill's statement that "eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard." If the desire for self-expression predominates, the type is that of poetry. As Shelley says: "A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds." And Mrs. Browning:

What the poet writes,
He writes; mankind accepts it if it suits.

As to the relation of rhythm to poetry and prose, Professor Scott holds that in self-expression "the individual is busy primarily with his own thoughts and feelings. His mind is self-centered. . . . Under such circumstances it is possible for the rhythm to be shaped by purely physiological or psychological causes." But communicative utterance "arises, as in the cry for help, from the urgent necessities of a practical situation. It adapts itself to these necessities. . . . Its rhythm is determined by the auditor's response." I believe that Scott's distinction between poetry and prose is a correct one and it is not my purpose to try to disprove it. I should like, however, to look at the problem not from the point of view of the purpose of the poet or the prose writer, but rather from the point of view of *two different mental processes* involved in these two types of literary composition.

Furthermore, it seems to me that the simple rhythm of poetry is due not so much to the fact that the individual is busy with his own thoughts and feelings, as to the fact that his thoughts are not in the nature of problems which call for the forming of explicit judgments. And, again, the irregularity of the rhythm of prose is due not so much to the delay incident to the gaining of a response, as to the mental process of reflective thought and of forming judgments.

Our understanding of the whole problem can perhaps be somewhat deepened and clarified if we examine it from a slightly different angle. The difference between poetry and prose rests, I believe, upon a difference in the nature of two mental processes: in poetry the intellectual content is furnished by the process of *direct apprehension*, or *immediate understanding*; in prose it is furnished largely by *indirect comprehension*, or *judgment and reflective thought*. To be sure, this does not constitute a complete definition of poetry and prose, but it is, I believe, the basic distinction between them, and from it can be derived the essential characteristics of each. From this point of view, rhythm will also appear in its proper relation to poetry and prose, if we examine it in the light of psychology, for we shall see that any series of impressions or of nerve and muscle reactions will irresistibly take a rhythmic form, except when interfered with by the conscious effort that is involved in the process of indirect comprehension. And lastly, the element of emotion can be assigned to its proper place, when we recall that the difference in the effects produced by the two types of literature is a matter of two different phases of esthetic feeling, rather than one of the presence and absence of emotion. The discussion falls under three heads: first, apprehension and comprehension; second, the relation of rhythm to poetry; and third, emotion and esthetic feeling.

I

Psychologists tell us that there are two ways of grasping meaning, the direct and the indirect. Familiar objects,

such as books, chairs, etc., we *apprehend*, or understand immediately upon perception; the meaning is directly apparent in the perception, or at least it follows so quickly that we are not conscious of forming a judgment; we accept it unconsciously and without question. Simple, immediate apprehension may result also without sensational perception by mere intellectual attention to an experience in memory or in imagination. On the other hand, there are objects and situations in which the meaning is not directly apparent, does not coincide with the act of perception, but must be *indirectly comprehended*. In such cases, we stop and search for the meaning; we are confronted by a problem; we assume a questioning attitude toward the matter; suggestions are aroused; we test the correctness of each suggestion and accept it or reject it. In this way we form an *explicit judgment*. And if the process involves the conscious drawing of an inference from our abstract and generalized knowledge, we call it *reasoning*, or *reflective thought*. Comprehension involves division of attention between two mental contents; apprehension represents singleness of attention. This is a fundamental point of difference.

If we examine poetry and prose in the light of these two mental processes, we shall find that apprehension is the method of poetry, comprehension the method of prose. To be sure, prose contains a certain amount of apprehension, but in the main this holds true. And no distinction need be made in either case between writer and reader; both the poet and the prose writer express themselves just as their minds naturally worked, and the reader receives the ideas by the same process. Let us illustrate by concrete examples. I take first a piece of scientific prose. The following is a part of the first paragraph of James's *Psychology*:

Psychology is the Science of Mental Life, both of its phenomena and their conditions. The phenomena are such things as we call feelings, desires, cognitions . . . and, superficially considered, their variety and complexity is such as to leave a chaotic impression on the observer. The most natural and consequently the earliest way of unifying the material

was, first, to classify it as well as might be, and secondly, to affiliate the diverse mental modes thus found, upon a simple entity, the personal Soul, of which they are taken to be so many facultative manifestations.

Here the questioning attitude can be detected immediately; the author is constantly confronted by a complex set of facts; he is constantly putting problems to himself: Is Psychology a science? Is it a science of mental life? Does it include more than the phenomena? Does it include also the conditions? What are the phenomena? Are they simple or varied and complex? Have we a clear or chaotic impression of them, etc. Every statement, practically every phrase, represents an explicit judgment reached after a process of questioning. To be sure, the judgments may have been formed very rapidly, and some of them almost unconsciously, because of the author's familiarity with the subject, but his mental attitude was undoubtedly one of questioning, weighing, deciding; he was careful to make accurate statements, the correctness of which could not be satisfactorily challenged.

Contrast with this a stanza from Shelley's *The Cloud*:

I wield the flail of the lashing hail,
And whiten the green plains under;
And then again I dissolve in rain;
And laugh as I pass in thunder.

There is here no questioning attitude, no forming of judgments. For the poet, the hail *is* a lashing flail, and the cloud *laughs*. He *apprehends* these pictures directly, vividly, and assumes that everyone else does the same. He does not question and test the correctness of his statements; he anticipates no challenge of their truth. In poetry, then, there is no attempt to convince. But, on the other hand, poetry is more than mere self-expression; it represents also a desire on the part of the poet to make others, kindred souls, appreciate vividly and with pleasure facts which they already know, or which they accept immediately and without questioning.

Looked at from this point of view, many of the catchwords of literary criticism may appear in a somewhat new light. We speak of the poet's intuition, or vision, or inspiration; we say that he lives in intimate contact with nature and with human experience. These are all merely different ways of saying that he grasps meaning immediately, concretely, vividly, without weighing suggestions and forming explicit judgments before making his statements. This does not mean, however, that the poet's apprehension and expression are devoid of suggestions; on the contrary, suggestion constitutes, as we all know, one of the chief characteristics of poetry; but such suggestions are not the kind that demand to be weighed and accepted or rejected; they are merely associated ideas of varying degrees of unusualness, which are called up by the original perception, and they add richness to it without causing any delay in the mental process.

Again, poetry is said to be concrete, prose abstract. This accords with our division of the two types, because in perception through sensation, as also in memory and imagination (and these are the province of poetry), we are always dealing with concrete objects and experiences, whereas abstraction and generalization are the result of judgment and reason. Hence it is that the language of poetry consists chiefly of figures of speech, such as the simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, etc., for these all make for concreteness and immediate apprehension. The purpose of the devices of poetic diction is to stimulate the attention and thereby suppress the functioning of the reason. With our mind's eye we must see the picture so vividly that no questioning as to the truth or plausibility of the idea can arise in us; we must take the poet on faith; our reason must be suppressed. What finer poetry, but less plausible fact, than *The Ancient Mariner* or *Prometheus Unbound*.

The exclusion of reason from the field of poetry refers merely to the *process* of reasoning, not to its *result*. To be sure, there may be reason in poetry; in some poetry there is a

great deal of it. Every poet reflects more or less on the problems of life, on human experience, but when he comes to express his ideas, he abandons the process of weighing and judging, grasps the idea immediately, vividly, and projects it concretely under the forms of sense perception or imagination. The truth which he states may show the result of reflection, may stand the test of reason, but the expression of it was not reached by the process of reasoning. And when we read such poetry, we do not receive it as argument, as carefully considered statement; we do not assume a questioning attitude toward it; we feel it to be correct, we accept it at once as truth. So-called reflective poetry of the Tintern Abbey or Rabbi Ben Ezra type does not contain systematic reflective thinking such as a philosopher or scientist would engage in. It represents merely a chain of associated ideas, presented in vivid imagery, conceived in a solemn, philosophizing mood, and arranged in a sequence which moves from a natural beginning to a natural end, that is, possesses artistic unity. And the effect which such poetry produces is not that of intellectual conviction, but rather of esthetic satisfaction.

So far, no reference has been made to the usual division of prose into works of art and scientific treatises, for the reason that these two types do not differ as to the mental process involved, but only as to the object of the author, and as to his manner of arranging the ideas. The scientist is concerned merely with stating the truth accurately, and with presenting his material in an orderly and logical manner; the artist wishes to produce a certain esthetic effect, and in order to do this, he must arrange his ideas and situations in a special sequence. Both the scientist and the novelist deal analytically with their facts, and it is entirely immaterial whether these facts be actual or imagined. This point will be referred to again under the discussion of esthetic feeling.

II

Now, what is the relation of rhythm to poetry and prose? Rhythm is the regular recurrence of stress, the periodic alternation of tension and relaxation. The human organism always reacts rhythmically to a series of stimuli. If, for example, we center our attention on the ticking of a clock, we shall soon find ourselves stressing the alternate strokes. Any succession of equal impressions and of the corresponding muscular reactions will irresistibly take on a rhythmic form. This phenomenon is merely the physical counterpart of the rhythmical fluctuations of attention itself. The object of our attention is intermittently clear and obscure; there is a periodic rise and fall of vividness. The physiological explanation of this manner of functioning of the organism is to be found in the necessary alternation of activity and recuperation of the nerves and muscles, and the periodic form of such alternation seems to result in the greatest efficiency. This natural rhythm, however, is disturbed by the feeling of effort which accompanies the process of reflective thinking. Wundt² calls attention to this fact. Furthermore, it is a matter of common observation that a person engaged in any automatic rhythmic act, such as walking or dancing, will stop suddenly if confronted with a problem which demands conscious thought. This gives us a suggestion as to the relation of rhythm to poetry and prose. In poetry, the meaning is grasped immediately and without conscious effort. The intellectual content merely represents the poet's chain of associated ideas, suggestions accepted without mental effort, and the reader allows himself to be directed along the same line and in the same way. Such a process offers no obstacle to the natural rhythmic functioning of the organism. In prose, on the other hand, the mind is presented with problems which require reflection, thought, the conscious expenditure of effort, and division of attention, and this does interfere with normal rhythmic functioning.

² *Völkerpsychologie*, I, part 2, p. 386.

Poetry which represents too much of the effort of thinking tends just to that extent to become unrhythmical; and prose which largely assumes the consent of the reader borders closely upon poetry and tends irresistibly to become rhythmical. Poets differ much in this respect. Tennyson's lines, for example, we read with easy and well-marked rhythm; but much of Browning's verse is for the average reader at first rather halting and unrhythmical. This is not due solely to obscureness of expression and to the unusualness of the chain of mental images; it arises also from the fact that his work exhibits a rather heavy admixture of the process of thought. Take for example the first two stanzas of *The Laboratory*:

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them!—I am here.

The expression in these stanzas is not especially obscure, nor is the chain of ideas very unusual; but the poet seems to be trying too hard to state his facts accurately; these lines are almost prose. Of course, the bulk of Browning's work is excellent poetry, representing in the main the *result* of very sane and profound reflection, expressed in bold and telling imagery; but we must admit that it exhibits at times also the *process* of thinking.

We can say, then, that simple rhythm, or meter, is the essential form of poetry; that this form, however, is not determined by any emotional quality of poetry, but rather by the fact that the whole human organism reacts rhythmically except when the mind is occupied with the process of thinking. A series of ideas obtained by apprehension will irresistibly take on rhythmic form; but, on the other hand, this very rhythm will aid in rendering our appreciation of the ideas

more vivid and intense. Again, different chains of idea induce different moods and feelings, and express themselves in different rhythms, and, on the other hand, the rhythm reacts to intensify the mood. Hence, rhythm is not only an essential of poetry, it is also a positive aid in the producing of effects.

III

Just a few words regarding the idea that poetry appeals to the emotions, prose to the reason. In psychology, in literary criticism, and in common usage, the word "emotion" refers generally to such psychophysical phenomena as joy, grief, anger, fear, hope, etc. Sometimes the word is used in a rather lax way, as the equivalent of "feeling," and we meet such expressions as "religious emotion," and "esthetic emotion." But for the sake of accuracy, it would seem desirable to limit the word to the former meaning. Now emotion in this sense is not the distinctive characteristic of poetry. The inappropriateness of the word "emotion," as it is generally used in connection with poetry, has been pointed out by Professor Neilson.³ In its place, he suggests the term "intensity"; and he characterizes this quality of a poem as "the result of the artist's caring immensely about whatever aspect of his work especially appeals to him." Edgar Allan Poe, also, must have been trying to avoid the word "emotion" when, in his essay on the Poetic Principle, he spoke of this quality as "the elevating excitement of the soul."

What, then, is this element of poetry which is so often referred to as emotion, and wherein does it differ from the feeling produced in us by a piece of prose fiction? The answer, of course, is that we have here two types, or phases, of the *esthetic feeling*, and this is something very different from an ordinary emotion. The esthetic feeling is no doubt accompanied by a slight suggestion of an emotion, but what we primarily experience upon reading a poem or a novel, as in the enjoyment of painting or music, is not an emotion,

³ *Essentials of Poetry*, p. 29.

but the esthetic thrill, the "elevating excitement of the soul." The term "intensity" is undoubtedly preferable to that of "emotion," if by it we mean intensity of esthetic feeling. But it should be remembered that prose fiction also produces an esthetic feeling very similar to that produced by poetry. The matter will be made clearer by a brief glance at the nature of emotions and the esthetic feeling. To be sure, psychologists do not agree exactly in their interpretation of these two phenomena, but the following statements represent perhaps the most generally accepted views.

Emotions may be defined as very intense and complex feelings, representing high organic excitation and conflicting instinctive reactions, with a resultant stoppage of mental activities. According to William James, emotion is merely a group of sensations reflexly excited by some object or situation; "bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and our feeling of the changes as they occur is the emotion." Others maintain that the bodily sensations are not the whole of the emotion, but that mental processes which are started by the perception also form a part of the complex state. At any rate, the bodily reactions, such as the quickened pulse, short breath, the pale or the flushed face, the flow of tears, the lump in the throat, and the common instinctive reactions of fight, or flight, etc., are the motor counterparts of certain psychic states. The interruption of mental activities mentioned above is peculiar to the emotions; in all other feelings, the processes of perception, thought, and imagination go on without any special disturbance.

The esthetic feeling, on the other hand, is characterized by a heightened functioning, or stimulation, of the whole organism, combined with inhibition of action, unusual concentration of attention, a state of rapt contemplation, or repose, loss of consciousness of self, and unusual activity of the imagination. Everything is excluded from the field of attention except the one thing in which we are absorbed, and appreciation and enjoyment become for this reason

the more intense and vivid. The esthetic feeling may be looked upon as a form of satisfied expectation. In music, for example, there is set up a chain of tone and rhythm, in literature a chain of ideas; and according to a fundamental demand of our nature, the chain, or sequence, calls for a certain continuation and conclusion. The getting of the tone or idea that we feel to be the right one creates for us the sense of perfection, of unity, and in this illusion, then, by a process which is sometimes called "sympathetic imitation," or "sympathetic feeling," we ourselves actually experience a moment of perfection. Until the expectation is satisfied, the psychophysical organism is in a state of suspense, of disturbed equilibrium, in a kind of conflict, and the esthetic feeling is in the nature of a reconciliation, or resolving, of contending forces.

It will be seen, then, that the common emotions and the esthetic feeling stand in sharp contrast to each other. Emotion represents turmoil, conflict, instinctive reactions, the endeavor to reach a goal; esthetic feeling represents repose, reconciliation of conflict, satisfied expectation, inhibition of action, equilibrium. Emotion is accompanied by stoppage of mental activity; esthetic feeling favors vividness and intensity of attention and unusual activity of imagination. This distinction is of great importance, for it shows us how negligible must be the element of real emotion, both in literature and in the other arts. A poem or a novel does not *contain* such emotions as anger, fear, pity, joy; it merely contains the *idea* or *suggestion* of the emotion; it deals with emotion, but is not real emotion, either for the poet or the reader. When we read a so-called emotional poem or novel, we do not ourselves experience the emotion of pity, or fear, or jealousy; we are merely conscious of the idea of the emotion. What we do actually experience is the esthetic feeling, or, as Ethel D. Puffer⁴ expresses it, "pleasurable excitement . . . with a fringe of emotional association." The esthetic

⁴ *The Psychology of Beauty*, p. 282.

feeling always culminates in stimulation, exhilaration, satisfaction, pleasure, whereas the real emotions are in many cases decidedly unpleasurable. And what is true of the reader is also true of the poet; he was not actually experiencing the emotion when he wrote the poem; if he had been, he probably could not have written it; the emotion would have disturbed his mental activity to such an extent that he could not have viewed the experience in its universal aspect. Is not this what Wordsworth had in mind when he said that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity"? Schiller in his criticism of Bürger's poems discusses this point, saying that the poet must free himself from his inner experience and objectify and idealize it before he can write about it; that he should beware of attempting to depict grief while he himself is still suffering grief. The poet must work himself through his emotion and reach a state of mental equilibrium before he can create a work of art which will produce an esthetic experience for the reader.

Let us illustrate the matter of the esthetic feeling produced by poetry by examining one of the great imaginative works of English literature, *The Ancient Mariner*. This is one of the best poems to study from this point of view, because of the great number of elements with which the poet operates. You will recall that Coleridge carries us through a long series of contrasted ideas: heat and cold, light and dark, calm and motion, clearness and mist, joy and grief, innocence and guilt, sin and atonement, the beautiful and the ugly, life and death, etc., and each of these is presented to us vividly, concretely, so that we apprehend it immediately, see it, or hear it, or feel it with the imagination. Now these elements are not *emotions*; they are *ideas*, suggestions, mental images, and they are, in the province of the mind, what musical tones are in the province of physical sensation; they are, in the hand of the poet, what tones are in the hand of the musician. And our enjoyment in both cases is due to the fact that the artist carries us through a series of pleasing ideas (or tones), each of which follows

naturally on the preceding one, and brings us finally back to the starting point, or to that end toward which the series moves from the beginning. The pleasure is purely an esthetic one, depending partly upon the beauty of the single elements, but chiefly upon the movement and its culmination. This movement is generally spoken of as a chain of disturbed equilibrium, and the culmination consists in the restoring of the equilibrium. We feel this very definitely in music. When a certain chain of melody is started up, it cannot stop at just any point; our consciousness of harmony and rhythm (which at bottom are one and the same) is in a state of disturbed equilibrium, and the conflict must be resolved in a restored equilibrium. Now exactly the same thing is true of poetry; the mental images correspond to the tones of music. The poet sets up a certain chain of images through which we move in a state of disturbed equilibrium until the series is brought to an end which restores that equilibrium. Hence the culmination of the movement of such a chain is often called "satisfied expectation." Now in *The Ancient Mariner*, although the poet operates with a great many different elements in the single parts of the work, yet he lets the chief movement of the poem as a whole consist in the transition from the idea of hate to that of love. Consequently, from purely artistic considerations he was forced to let his poem end with a note of perfect love:

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

That is the *idea* toward which the series irresistibly moves. Coleridge was not moralizing, not trying to teach a lesson, when he wrote those lines. In fact, he himself later said: "The moral sentiment intrudes on the reader too much as the principle or the cause of the action. It ought to have had no more moral than an Arabian Night's tale." The beauty of *The Ancient Mariner* lies in the fact that it consists of a

series of vivid mental images, each of which follows naturally on the preceding one, until the chain reaches a perfectly satisfying end. Throughout the course of this movement the reader is held "spellbound," as we say, like the wedding guest himself. For the time he accepts as fact all of this mass of utter nonsense. Why? Because he sees it so vividly with his mind's eye that his faculty of reason is suppressed. "Seeing is believing."

Let us try now to define more accurately the difference between prose fiction and poetry from the point of view of the esthetic feelings produced by each. This can be best done by comparing poetry and prose with some of the other arts. Painting and music make their appeal through the eye and the ear; they are purely sensational. A painting pleases through symmetry of design and harmony of colors; music through rhythm and harmony of tones. They possess no real intellectual content, except the capacity to suggest an idea, a situation, a mood, and to stimulate the imagination. Literature, on the other hand, possesses intellectual content; human experience, ideas, form its very substance. But, as has been shown above, the nature of this intellectual content differs in the fields of poetry and prose. The novelist follows the method of the writer of a scientific treatise; both deal analytically with the facts; the novelist is concerned with analyzing motive and character, with convincing the reason, with telling his story, that is, with imparting information, and what he says must be plausible. All this involves reflection and the forming of judgments, and such mental processes interfere with our natural rhythmical functioning. In a novel, the intellectual content is the whole substance of the art; there is no sensational element of rhythm; the esthetic effect depends solely on the sequence of ideas and the form in which they are presented. And although minor esthetic feelings may be aroused at points during the course of the novel, yet it is only at the end that the real culminating thrill, the satisfaction, is experienced. (The pleasure which we feel *during* the reading of a novel

is in the main derived from recognition, surprise and suspense, and these are of an intellectual, not an esthetic, nature.) But in poetry, in which the intellectual content is furnished by immediate apprehension, there is no obstacle to rhythmic functioning and a rather free play of the imagination, so that, in addition to the esthetic feeling which is produced by the poem as a whole, there is throughout its length a constant stimulating and intensifying, due to the reaction of rhythm and imagination on the esthetic feeling. Thus, poetry occupies a position midway between music and prose fiction; it represents a blending of sensational and intellectual elements; in its rhythm and tone effects it approaches music, in its intellectual content it approaches prose. Carlyle very fittingly characterized poetry as "musical thought."

Just a few words regarding narrative poetry and its relation to prose fiction. In its beginnings all poetry was narrative; the ballad and epic relate the exploits of the tribe or its hero. But it must be borne in mind that the stories which make up these poems were well known to all the hearers; in fact, the different members of the group had a share in the composition of this folk poetry; the subject matter was the common possession of the whole tribe, and the end was known from the beginning. The interest in the story did not center in the development and solution of the plot, but merely in the manner in which the familiar events were allowed to pass in review before the minds of the hearers. The poet was under no obligation to satisfy his hearers intellectually by making his story appear plausible. About the facts and the outcome of the events there was no question. And, as we have seen above, as long as the subject matter is accepted by the hearer or reader without any questioning about its truth or correctness, the natural form of the composition is poetry. This is true of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, of *Beowulf*, of the *Nibelungenlied*, of the *Canterbury Tales*, and of *Paradise Lost*. It has often been said that no narrative poem has persisted and become

a recognized masterpiece, which was not based upon a story that was well known to the readers of its time. But with the invented story, the new story, the situation is quite different. We are interested in the outcome of the plot, the solution of the tangle, and our intelligence must be satisfied; the whole thing must be made reasonably plausible within the world in which the events occur. For this type of narrative, prose is the natural medium of expression; and if one attempts to tell such a story in verse, he is encroaching upon the province of prose, and his effort is likely to result in an artificial product. The well-known story should be told in poetry, the new story in prose.

In conclusion may I attempt a definition of poetry based upon the foregoing discussion: Poetry is that form of literary art in which the content consists of a series of mental images which are sufficiently vivid and unusual to force the attention to occupy itself entirely with the act of apprehension, to the complete suppression of the faculty of reflective thinking; and this series of mental images, which will most naturally develop in simple rhythmic form, must be arranged in such order as that the sequence moves toward and finally reaches that end which we instinctively feel to be the right end, the satisfying end; that is, the whole series, like any other work of art, must produce for us that peculiar excitation which we call the esthetic experience.

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